

0-0-1 The Gate Guardian

Destruction of The Axis



RING! RING! RING! The cashier keeps ringing the bell for an order of food that's *currently* being made. "Charles! Get the food out!"

"I'm working as fast as the chef, Myrtle!" I shout back, loading up yet another plate of food, and running off back to the tables.

"Here you go," I say, laying down a sandwich and grits and swiftly moving on to the next table, "And there you go."

"Charlie!" I hear Myrtle shouting at me again.

I set down the last plate, "Have a nice meal-" I rush back to behind the counter and pick up the large special from Ugly Myrtle and some fat customer has been on my case about.

"Sorry for the wait-"

"Can it, lady," he interrupts me, "Just give me my food and get out of here, bitch."

"*Okay*," I reply, "Have a nice meal."

"Charles," Ugly Myrtle says, "That's the third one today, you need to step up your game."

"Okay, Myrtle," I say back, grabbing another plate and busing out to the table.

I stop midstep to look at one of the televisions on a news station. I look around and realize a majority of the customers are glued to the intellavision, with only the smaller kids with their eyes covered by their mothers.

“The Red Army is progressing further across the continent, veering northward towards the Anglin Empire despite current military sources saying that the Red Army had no interest in-”

“That’s enough of that,” I say, turning the intellavision to a cartoon channel, and continue to buss tables.

“Charles!” she shouts across the restaurant.

“Yes, Myrtle?” I yell back.

“Quit messing with the IV!”

“I’m just-” I shout, “Nevermind.”



I put my hands behind my back and pull the strings to my corset uniform for the restaurant as I walk down the street. I look around, trying to enjoy the nice weather before I go in for my 10-hour shift.

I walk up to the restaurant and pull on the locked door. “Freaking Myrtle,” I say to myself, looking through the darkened window to find no one in there.

I back away a little bit and see the reflection behind me and see a silver man, towering above the city. “What the?” I whisper to myself, turning around to see the giant silver man pushing over Freelong Tower in downtown.

I hurry to get my keys from my purse, hurrying my little fingers through the trinkets. “Frick, frick, frick,” I say, realizing they were left on my side table. I zip up my bag and look around, watching the tallest tower in the city fall down to the ground. I see a shock wave full of dirt and dust start moving outward.

I hear the rumble of tanks turn the corner on the street. I look over my shoulder to see big vehicles marching towards me. “Evacuate! Evacuate!” I hear a man shout, brandishing the red army uniform. I start running away from them and one of my heels breaks off, throwing me to the ground.

I hear footsteps run towards me as I try to get back up. Someone lifts me up. “Let me go!” I yell, trying to punch my way out of his hold.

“This is a full state evacuation,” he says, “0-0-1 has lost control and-” a huge energy ray aimed right at my restaurant. The place explodes and I feel the intense heat from the ray moving down the street. I start screaming in calamity as the soldier carries me off. He tosses me into a truck where another man pulls me down after another explosion.

“Go! Go! Go!” someone shouts as the truck starts turning back around in the street. I finally lift my head up to see the death ray blasting away my neighborhood.

“Oh-” I start crying before I’m grabbed and shoved into a seat.

“Stay down!” he shouts over the destruction, “Didn’t you get the evacuation demand? It was broadcast statewide!”

“I didn’t-” I try to say.

“Move out!” he shouts, “0-0-1 has lost control!”

The truck starts to turn around and I see the war tanks marching forward further into the city, but we’re driving into the enemy’s side.

“Where are you taking-” I try to ask before getting cut off by an explosion.

“We’re taking you to safety, behind 0-0-1,” he says, covering his head from debris. Once it clears, he slaps a pair of handcuffs around my wrists. The engines of the truck roars and we speed up and I see even more destruction.

I look up to the sky as we drive deeper into the city and see overseas’ planes flying overhead, raining fire down on the giant silver man, but I see it swat the planes out of the air.

And then I see it: the big plane, the kind that drops the city-erasing bombs. I see it drop a small spec from the underside. I raise my arms over my head and... *FLASH!*



I feel the cold touch against all my body, then an intense burning sensation eating away at my hair and skin, only sparing the areas covered by my arms. I hear the Red Army men shouting and the car swerves and jumps up as we hit something. The rumble and the shock wave hit and the glass shatters all around.

I look back up, feeling the crunching of my sintered skin and arm hair. To see the fireball seemingly frozen in time with the silver man reaching into it. The longer I stare at it, the darker it becomes, the fireball turning almost black in the air.

“What the hell is that?” I shout, pointing at the silver man.

“Get down!” a soldier pushes my arm back and standing over me. Bombs start going off and chaos begins to ensue. I hear the radio on his chest start chattering.

“O-0-1 just absorbed the nuclear blast and seemingly went docile!” the radio says, but then the death ray from the silver man blasts into the air and strikes the big plane.

“Not docile!” he says back into the radio, “*Not* docile!”

I look up again at the horrors and I see the blank face of the silver man staring right at me, it seems. And the ray hits right next to the truck, tossing the truck to and fro. “Not *fracking* docile!” he shouts, signaling something to someone, “Haul ass, man!”

The car screeches and starts moving erratically before stabilizing. I look around and try to lift my arm, but I'm still cuffed down.

"Where-" I try to say, interrupted by some gunfire, "Where are you taking me?!" We pass by some more tanks marching through the city and I see all the destruction that's been wrought by the Red Army.

"Somewhere safer than this!" he shouts back, being followed by another explosion.



“So, young lady,” someone walks in this room I’ve been put in. They drove me all the way to the coast where I saw, like footsteps in the snow, the annihilation of two cities. They lead me into a boat and pulled me along while I was in utter shock. “Here’s some good news: you’re out of harm’s way-”

“Out of harm’s way?” I retort, “What the hell was that silver man?”

“That, miss,” he says, “Is classified information on both sides of this war.”

“*That’s classified*,” I mock him.

“You’re out of harm’s way,” he continues, “But you’re also technically a war prisoner now.”

“What?!” I express my surprise, “I’m not- I’m a- a waitress at- at the Betty’s”

“Not anymore, 0-0-1 laid waste to your entire city. Thankfully, it seems that everyone *but you* got the evacuation demand,” he brushes back his hair, “Why is that by the way, it was on intellavision for, like, 6 hours; the radio is still going on.”

“I don’t have one, it’s too expensive, and- and who listens to the radio anymore.”

“Anyway,” he tries to say something else, “You’re with the Red Army now, and you’ll be placed overseas in our territory.”

“Isn’t the Anglin Empire your territory now, can’t I just go home?”

“Your *entire* city was destroyed, remember,” he reminds me, “You no longer have a home.” I try to stand up, but the chain snaps on the cuffs. He tosses me a plastic bag full of something, “It’s applesauce, to tide you over.”

He walks over and flips on an intellavision and promptly walks out. I look down at my arm with some emergency burn patches and think to myself, *What the hell am I into now.*

The intellavision finally tunes in to some war propaganda channel from the Red Army. Trumpets and video of armies marching in unison. “Do your part in the war! Get a job, work hard, buy bonds!”

My stomach grumbles and it’s going to be a long day.



One of the more good looking soldiers pulls on my cuff's chain through this crowd of people. "Come on," he pulls, "Charlie, was it? How are your burns?" I walk along in silence in this huge group of people, I think they're all immigrants moving inland. I keep hearing the same trumpet tune from the war propaganda played on repeat.

I look up above all the people and see 10 or so check-in stations that everyone is funneling through. Soldiers with guns standing in between each one and one more checking everyone in.

"Is everyone in the Red Army?" I retort.

"Every able-bodied young man between 17 and 40; the second-largest military in the world," he replies, "For me, though- you're probably thinking 'do I really know who I'm fighting for?' For me, it's economic stability. I got little siblings, y'know."

"What a sob story-"

"No, Charlie," he says, "These people right here next to you; they got sob stories. *You* got a sob story."

"Hail Hister, right?" I mock him.

"Hey, do yourself a favor and watch what you say around here," he tells me, "Captain pulled a lot of strings just to put you here, he's got a soft spot, y'know, but they got ears on every inch of this country."

"Where am I, really?" I ask him.

"Lordov Check-in, northern Yekiv province," he replies.

"That's the-" some lady bumps right into my burns in my arm, "That's the first straight answer I've gotten this past week."

“We’re almost at the checkpoint,” he turns to me, “I cannot stress this enough, after that checkpoint, Charlie, you are a citizen of this great country and you must abide by its laws or so help you.”

“*So help me-*” I mock him, but he pull me close and whispers into my ear.

“Keep that up, and you’re going to end up in a concentration camp,” he whispers. My spine shivers and my arm begins to hurt, “You’ll be a pretty face once you’ve healed up.”

He pulls me up to the check-in and the armed soldier looks at me and shakes his head in shock. “What the hell happened to her?”

“Pull her out of Greenwich,” he replies, handing him my chain.

“No shit, huh,” he says, “Come here pretty lady, let’s check you in

“Name.”

“Ch-charlie,” I clear my throat.

“Charlie what?” the check-in soldier asks.

“Wertson.”

“Occupation?”

The handsome soldier walks up, “Um, she’s, uh, war prisoner. There should be some special paperwork for that.”

“You should’ve led with that,” he looks over the desk at his name badge, “Charles.”

I look over to see him pulling out a file cabinet and looking through stacks of paper. Finally, he pulls out a form and begins to write on it. “Charlie Wertson, was it?” he asks.

“Yes-”

“Yes,” *Charles* interrupts me. I turn my head and scowl at him for interrupting me.

"Where'd you pick up this broad, Charles?" another soldier asks.

"Greenwich," he says. The man behind the desk looks at him in disbelief.

"Greenwich was wiped off the map after a full state evacuation. There should've been no one on the island."

"Just do the paperwork," Charles looks over the desk, "*Yokov*."

The soldier behind the desk continues to ask me my age and whatnot until the paper is full. He runs it through a machine and it spits out an exact replica of the paperwork, something I haven't seen too often.

He stamps and hands me the copy and says, "Congratulations, you are not a beloved citizen of the New Staten Empire. Please proceed forward and take your introduction manual."

Charles pulls me along beyond the threshold and grabs the 5-centimeter thick book for me.

"I cannot stress this enough Charlie," he goes on again, unlocking my cuffs and setting me free, "Read this book, and abide by the rules here."

"I've seen the camps on the intellavision," I retort, "How can I?"

"Because you have no choice here," he replies, pushing the textbook in my burnt hand. He pulls out a small slip of paper and puts it in my other hand, "If you need anything, I'll be back in town in 3 weeks."

BOOM! The ground shakes and some dust falls down on me. *Not again*, I think to myself. *BOOM!* People start screaming and running about. I shield myself from the dust falling. The hum of planes passes by above as I look up to see them: the Allies overhead.

“Go that way!” Charles points deeper into the facility as he brandishes a pistol.

“Wait!” I call out, but he runs off. I look around and *BOOM!* Another explosion goes off, forcing me to run further and further into the Lordov Checkpoint.



I hear turrets going off outside, followed by explosions. The remaining soldiers herd everyone together, shouting in another language.

“Bunker! Bunker!” Someone shouts, pointing to a pair of huge double doors, slowly opening by themselves. Push comes to shove to get inside, people just barreling through each other. Someone rams right into my patched burns, pushing me over in agony.

“Go! Go! Go!” Soldiers shout. Another bomb goes off and I see part of the building collapsing, spewing dust and rubble everywhere, with a piece hitting my head.

I try to lift my head back up, my vision blurry, and try and find a way into the bunker. I stumble onto my feet, but I’m pushed over by another bystander. Everything seems to be muffled, but I can still hear the turrets firing off.

Someone pulls me up, but I can’t see who it is. They carry me through the crowd until we make it through the double doors and I’m blinded by fluorescent white light. I push them away and get on my feet while my vision clears up.

“Wha-what’s happening?” I manage to say.

“The Allies are bombing the Checkpoint,” I hear Charles say.

“I thought you left,” I stabilize on my feet.

“Captain put you in my care,” he says, my eyes focusing on a rifle he’s holding, “You’re my top priority, that is after God and country.”

“Ha. Ha,” I sarcastically laugh at him.

He announces something in another language to the hoard of people in the bunker, waving his hands at everyone.

“I think the raid is done!” he repeats.

I fall on my behind and try to curl up, thinking, *What the hell is happening? A week ago I was working 10-hour shifts at Betty's.*

Charles picks me up by the arm, "This isn't the time to cry."

BOOM! Dust falls from the ceiling. I look around to see people huddling around each other, whimpering like dogs. Charles' radio starts talking and he talks back. "They're gone!" he shouts as the bunker doors roll open.

My eyes poke through to see the carnage left behind, the roof over the entrance area completely caved in, rubble everywhere. I clutch the paperwork tighter, folding it up and sliding it into my pocket.

"Hold on to that," he whispers into my ear, "Single file! Single File!"

I begin to notice the beating drum that is my heart in my ear. I look down at my hands to see them shaking, but I subside the thoughts and walk out of the bunker.



“My mother is very hospitable, you can stay with my family until the government programs kick in,” Charles says. He looks at the taxi driver and gives him the instructions to the destination.

“How-How often exactly do bombings happen, again?” I ask.

“That girl needs to watch her mouth there, soldier,” the driver says.

“She hasn’t read the citizen’s handbook yet,” he replies before leaning to me, “The Amerians bomb our territories almost weekly, they’re unrelenting.”

“What about France?” I retort.

“Watch her tongue, soldier!” the taximan shouts.

“Please, Charlie, refrain-”

“Refrain from what?!” I shout, “Am I just supposed to roll over and become a Nazi?”

The taxi slams to a stop, “Soldier, you need-”

“Don’t make me arrest you,” Charles snaps at him, “Drive!”

The car picks back up again, this time with the driver watching the road. “It’s not so bad here, Charlie,” he says, “It’s nice here, it’s economically stable, there are jobs; the Amerians won’t fly out this far into the country.

“Look, if you like, I can even get a job like your old one; you’re a waitress, right?”

“I’m not too eager to start busing tables again,” I reply.

“We’re here,” the driver tells us.

I open the door and see an apartment complex; it looks new, nicely painted a shade of brown. He puts his hand on my back, leading me up the steps. "They're up on the second floor," he says, walking up the metal staircase.

He counts the doors and settles on one of them, and starts banging on the door. "Mama!" he yells, "Mama!"

The door unlocks, and I hear three locks slide and the door opens. A middle-aged woman answers and greets him in the other language. They converse and kiss each other on the cheeks.

"Mama," he says, "I need her to stay here while the government kicks in."

She replies in that other language and huddles me inside. It's nice, I see a couch and an intervision, two more than I had back home. But that's all gone now, even my savings. I look over and see a young girl and a teenager sitting at a table. The table's nice too, it's made of glass.

"Did Charles bring home a wife this time?" the teenage girl asks the lady, but she doesn't reply in English. The two girls laugh a little and the lady brings me a bowl of soup.

She repeats a word, and the teenager tells me, "She says to eat."

"Charles!," she shouts as he walks in behind me, "Who's this? She looks American!"

"She's Anglin actually, Jessica. Treat her nicely," he replies, "It's lovely to see you too, but unfortunately, I can't stay. I have to go back out; can't stay for long."

"Can you bring me a gift next time?" *Jessica* asks.

"The Anglin island may not be around for much longer, but I'll try as hard as I can."

The lady forces the bowl into my hand and pulls me along to the glass table. "Wait, Charles!" I call out as I'm dragged by this lady.

"I'll be back in a couple of weeks!" he sarcastically waves goodbye as the door closes.

Jessica laughs, "So what's your story? Charles has had people stay here before; he's sentimental like that."

The lady sits me down at the table and hands me a spoon. "You should eat, it's pretty good. My mom's a good cook," she says.

"I'm, uh, from," I pause, circling the spoon, "Greenwich."

"Oh, no shit, huh?" she retorts, with her mother smacking the back of her head, "Sorry, ma."

The little girl repeats after her sister and is also promptly smacked by her mother. "I thought that place had a full-state evac?"

"I don't- didn't have IV or radio," I say, "I'd rather not talk about it, because I'm now apparently now a-"

"You sure don't anymore-" her mother smacks her again followed by some chatter, "You're right, that's insensitive." I lift the spoon, and take a sip on the soup; it's savory and still warm.

"What's your name?" the little girl asks.

"My name's, uh, Charlie," I reply, eating some more of the soup. I haven't had food this good in a while.

The lady, I think, talks to me but I don't understand. "She's asking if you have your paperwork, she'll take you to the office tomorrow to get it processed."

"Oh, that's okay-"

"She's insisting," she says, "The sooner, the better."

"I guess you can't say no then," I say, eating some more soup.

“So you’re basically a war prisoner, right?” Jessica persists on private details, but her mother just smacks her, “Mama!”

“Why are you covered in bandages?” the little girl asks me, but their mother shuts her down.

“She says to eat, it’s almost time for her favorite show, and then curfew,” Jessica tells me. I circle the spoon in the soup, thinking about all this, but not going anywhere. Their intellavision flips on, and some propaganda that I’ve heard at least 20 times by now turns on.

Do your part, it says; *Buy bonds*, it says; And *Heil Hister*, it says, before it cuts to some silent film comedy. Everything’s not in English here, not even on the IV. The program goes on for an hour as we all watch from the table. Eventually, I do finish the soup and the lady takes it from me and begins to wash it.



BOOM! People start screaming about the restaurant, the ceiling cracks. I rush up to the window and see the silver man, blasting away with his ray of destruction. Beaming back and forth, destroying everything in sight.

“Charles!” Myrtle yells at me, “What the hell is going on!?”

“Myrtle!” I shout, “Everyone! Stay calm-”

The beam of death hits the west side of Betty’s. I look to see in slow motion, the patrons being dissolved from the skin to the bone right before my eyes. I scream, freeze; everybody starts running around, pushing and shoving to get out.

Then the silver man looks at me, and I feel his deathly gaze shivering up and down my spine. I stare back at him like a deer stares into a car’s headlights.

I come back to reality and realize it was a dream, but I’m hyperventilating, looking around this unfamiliar house. The sound of blood rushing through my ears is deafening, but I try to slow my breathing down.

“Everything’s fine,” I say to myself, “Every-everything is okay; where am I?”

“I’m at-I’m at, uh,” I look around, seeing the couch I’m on, the intellavision, “I’m at, uh, Charles’.” My eyes adjust to the moonlit living room of this apartment.

“Oh, and I’m a Nazi,” I tell myself as my breathing slows back down to normal giving me back my gift of sarcasm, “That’s right.”

“Yeah, you’re *totally* a Nazi,” I hear someone say, scaring me out of my wits, “Charles sometimes has bad dreams, too, y’know.”

I recatch my breath, look to find Jessica, "I'm sure he's seen some shit."

"Careful to not let my mom hear you talk like that," she says, "She'll slap anyone."

We both chuckle a little. "What time is it?" I ask, rubbing my eyes.

"It's about an hour before sunrise," she replies, "5 in the morning."

"What are you doing up?"

I stand from the couch and start folding the blanket, and Jessica walks over to the kitchen. "I have trouble sleeping, that's all," she tells me, "You want some water?" She opens the cabinet and starts filling her glass from the faucet.

"Yeah, that'd be nice," I reply, walking over to their dining table, "it's nice here."

"Yeah, you could say that," she hands me a glass. I hear their mother start yelling from her room. The door opens and I see her ready for something.

"Mama!" Jessica shouts back. I awkwardly take a few steps back towards the couch as they talk to each other. "She's asking if your ready, the offices are opening soon," she tells me, followed by some more foreign yelling.

"Um," I pause, rubbing my face, "Yeah, I'm ready."

"Mardi!" Jessica shouts, for her sister I'm presuming, then making some exchanges with their mother. The little girl comes waddling out of her room.

Their mother walks over to me grabs my arm, pulling me along out the door. I look around to see no nightlife as the sun begins to peek through the mountainous horizon. Their mother starts chattering. “She says we’re walking, it’s only 10 minutes,” Jessica translates.

As we walk down the street, the sun rises, shining on the clouds. I think to myself, *I haven’t seen a sunrise like this in years*. But we walk and walk, turning a few corners into town, and it took much longer than 10 minutes. Finally, we walk up, what I think is, a post office, plastered with even more propaganda.

We go inside, and I hear nothing I can understand, but Jessica’s mother pulls me along and starts talking with the guy at the counter.

“He needs your paperwork, did you bring it?” Jessica asks me.

“Um,” I start patting down myself, but I find the papers in my front pocket, “Yeah, they’re right here.” I pull them out and hand them to the man.

He unfolds them and starts looking them over. He gets a look on his face and says something. “He says he hasn’t seen this kind of paperwork, but he’ll mail it out anyways,” she translates, “But he’ll just need a signature.”

I walk up and look around the paper he has there, not being able to read any of it, “I, uh-”

The man writes an X on a few lines and motions me to take the pen. “I can help you,” Jessica walks up and starts reading the page.

“I’m so glad people here are bilingual,” I say. Jessica goes through the page, asking me the questions and filling it out for me. After a few minutes, it’s all filled out and the man stamps it with a government seal.

“Now he just needs postage, and, uh,” she pauses to listen to him, “They usually process this stuff in a week or so.”

“I don’t have any money,” I confess, but their mother just pulls out her purse and rummages for a couple of coins to pay the postage. “Oh, uh, thanks,” I say, with Jessica repeating it for me.



“Charlie!” Jessica shouts from the outside. I hear her footsteps up the iron stairs.

“Um,” I clear my throat, not wanting to shout, “Yes?”

“You have a parcel!” she says, coming through the door, “It’s from the government.”

She hands it to me and it’s all in another language. “What’s it say?”

“It looks like, uh,” she pauses to read the information stapled to it, “*Job* stuff. You should open it, see what it is.”

I tear open the paper and I see a Jermain to Anglish dictionary and Jessica tells me there’s a work uniform inside as well, from the note that was inside.

“On the 1st, Charlie,” She tells me, “Don’t be late.” she raises her hands and wiggles her fingers at me to tease. “You’ll be working for the government as a typist, like a *real* Nazi.”

“Ha, ha,” I slow laugh, “Very funny Jessica.” I sigh, in a whirlwind of emotions, I contemplate this whole new life. My dreams are getting worse when I have them. I look at this tightly-folded ugly, military-green uniform that’s 10 years out of style.

“Hey,” she comes closer, purposely bumping into my shoulder, “Cheer up, at least you’re not in Greenwich.”

“I mean, it’s not that this is technically better, but-” I pause, “I wish I was-”

“There were confirmed 0 casualties,” She comforts me, “*Zero*.”

I pull up the uniform top and take an extended look at it. It looks a little small for me, and there’s a colored patch on the shoulder with a name tag, what I’m presuming to be, my name in Jermain.

“Don’t worry,” she says grabbing the bottom fringe on the fabric, “It stretches.”



I keep walking up these ridiculously missized steps to this fantastically large military building. It's head and shoulders above the buildings next to it, branded with bright red and black swastikas and SS banners. And these steps are just too large for a single step, but too small for 2 steps.

My ankle rolls in these heels that Charles' mother allowed me to borrow, but I keep walking without falling. I look around to make sure no one saw me stumble, but I look to find beyond the glass doors are more than a few soldiers in red armbands hailing at each other, and walking away.

"Ah crap," I say to myself, "I forgot about that."

I lift up my skirt so I can walk a little faster up the steps, preparing myself for the impropriety I'm about to perform. I come to the door, and one of them opens the tinted glass door.

"Oh, uh, thank you," I say, "Um-"

"Hail Hister!" he announces, raising his arm.

"Oh, uh, right," I began to raise my arm, drop it, raise it again, "Hail, uh, *Hister*?"

He lowers his hand and motions for me to come over. "With conviction next time!" I hear an older, accented man shout, "You are graced with being in the motherland, darling! Now shout it!"

"Oh, uh," I stammer, clearing my throat, "Hail! Uh, *Hister*."

"Conviction!" he shouts, marching over to me with his arm pointed up.

"Look, I'd rather not-"

"I know you're not from around here, Charlie," he taps my name tag with his finger, "Where are you from, darling?"

"I'm-I'm from Greenwich-"

"Oh, really?" he raises his voice, "A survivor!" he takes my arm and straightens it out above my shoulder. "Now, announce!"

I clear my throat, "Hail, Hister!" I quickly lower my voice, conscious I said it too loud.

"Perfect," he says, patting my shoulder, "Now where are you headed today?"

"I'm, actually, um, here for work."

"Ah, as a typist?" he says, tapping his finger on the colored badge, "Let me walk you to."

He motions me along and we begin to walk down into a hall. It's covered in 'military honor'; maps, portraits, photos, the like. The man is clad in the same ugly, military green, decorated with badges.

"Here we are," he opens a door, revealing a room with 5 by 5 grid of desks and chairs, filled with typewriters, women in uniforms and hats, and huge piles of paper, with an empty desk just for me. In uneasy unison, they all turn and smile at me. "*Guten tag*, my darling," he whispers into my ear, "That's what we say here."

"Yes," I clear my throat, "*Gu-guten tag*, everyone."

They all go back to their work, clacking away on the machines, dinging away on the bells, and then the door closes behind me. I freeze, just standing there with no intent when a woman with bright red hair walks up to me from behind a file cabinet.

"Guten tag," she says, before talking in Jermain.

"I-I, uh, don't speak Jermain," I tell her; she stops and calls out to someone.

One of the girls stands up to face us. "She says good morning. And she says you need to copy text from one paper to another with the machine, and set it aside. And it's all classified information. Understand?" she repeats.

"Yes, I under-" I clear my throat again, "I understand."

"Good," the redheaded lady says in a heavy accent, "Get to work." she motions to the empty desk. I awkwardly walk over and sit down, looking at the familiar characters on the machine.

I put some paper in the machine and look at the first paper in the stack, all in another language, but familiar in characters. I set the paper on the tray next to the machine and, slowly, type it out, letter by letter.

One of the girls leans over to me, "the girls are going out after this, you're welcome to come with us," she lets me know, "And you'll get to be pretty fast at this in time."

"Oh, thank you," I reply, as she leans back into her work.



“Ugh,” one of the girls sighs, “Time’s up for the day.”

I choke a little, looking at my significantly smaller pile of copied papers compared to hers. “Leave the paper there, the next girl will get it,” she says, “Come on, come out with us.”

“Okay,” I look at the half-done paper sitting there in the machine, “Where are you guys going?”

“Oh, to the bar,” she says, “You see some *pretty* soldiers sometimes.” I blush a little and pick up the stack of papers to straighten them.

“Oh,” she goes on to say something in Jermain, “You already have one in mind.”

“I really don’t,” I persist, “I’m just in a transition period in this country.”

“Then prove it and come with us, there’ll be dancing,” she says.

“I never said no,” I say, “But I’m not looking for a man.” I straighten the papers and stand up, faltering on the heels. She motions and almost all girls look ready to go. They all start murmuring about themselves in different languages amongst themselves.

They all, in perfect unison, say, “Hail Hister!” and raise their arms up. The boss lady does it in reply and they all look at me.

“Oh, right,” I whisper, “Uh, Hail *Hister*.”

“*Heil Hister!*” the lady replies and we all start funneling out.

I walk up next to the girl who speaks English and match her walking speed, nearly breaking my ankle in the process. “So, uh, are you the only one who speaks English?” I ask.

"Two other girls do," she confesses, "But not as well as me. Where are you from, *Charlie*?"

I remember the name badges and look at hers, not able to read it, "Greenwich, but I'd rather not talk about it-"

The girls all look back at me like I'm a ghost or something, but the girl shoos them away. "I wouldn't either," she says, "My name's Edith."

"Thanks, *Edith*," I say as we come by the workers in the front foyer.

"Hail Hister," they all stop and repeat, with the workers standing and replying.

"Oh, uh, Hail Hister," I raise my arm, but I catch a glimpse of the man who walked me in, officer's hat and monocle.

"With conviction!" He raises her hand and stomps his foot, "Hail Hister!"

I clear my throat and raise my hand in embarrassment. "Hail!" I cough, "*Hister*."

He smiles and lowers his arm, "Good enough for today." The girls start moving out and the workers back to their job.

Edith grabs my arm and pulls me along, nearly tripping me. "The bar is around the corner," she says, "there'll be dancing if there's a nice song and a *nice* man."

"Oh, fun," I awkwardly go about accepting this, "Where are all the male-workers?"

We make our way down these enraging steps. "Fighting the war," she replies, "But they get frequent motherland leave." we turn the corner and she points out the building with flashing lights in the window and a sign with a strange little man dancing.

She pulls me along across the street and into the building. I breathe in the oddly palatable smell of beer and whatnot compared to my old job at Betty's. The girls start funneling in behind us and everyone drunkenly hails us inside.

"I think I should-" I begin to make an excuse to go back to Charles' mother's, but she yanks me further into the establishment. She and the bartender exchange in Jermain and he walks off.

"What do you drink?" She asks.

"I don't, uh, I'm not a drinker," I tell her.

"*Soft!*" she yells.

"What's that," I ask, looking around to see a band playing music in the corner.

"Here," she hands me a juice box, "No good-lookers today,"

I look at the box in confusion, breaking down and opening it. The clock on the wall reads almost 5 o'clock. "I really should be going, Edith," I tell her, sipping some of the fruit juice.

"Aw," she pouts, "Walk safely, Charlie."

I wave my hand and make my way back *home*. The doors close behind me and a cold gust of wind hits me. I look up to see the silver man dawning on the city for a moment as my eyes adjust to a clock tower in the distance.

I brush it off and keep frantically walking through the street, like the face of the clock is about to shoot a ray of death when a car horn breaks my delusion. I brush it off and keep on going before the sun sets below the concrete jungles.



I take the key, and for the first time, open the door to my new apartment. The door swings open and I smell that fresh carpet smell. I take a step in and take in the empty room. Jessica looks over my shoulder and her mother smack my bottom, pushing through all of us. I shriek in surprise and move over for the lady.

"It's nice," Jessica says, "But it's super small."

"Well," I try to justify it, "I'm just one person."

Her mother starts going off in her language and exchanges with Jessica. "She says it's no place to raise kids," she translates.

I pucker my lips and I may be blushing, "Well, It's below budget and I'll be able to save money." I pull out my little wallet-purse and pull out my checkbook, soon to be stopped by their mother's hand.

"No," she whispers, sliding it back into my purse.

"Oh, uh, *Danke*," I say.

"Try again," Jessica says.

"Is that not the right word?" I look at her confused as the little girl is dancing around on the carpet.

"We should get going," she says, "I have studying to do."

"Yeah," I look at my watch, "I have to head to work too."

"Thank you guys so much for everything."

Their mother pats my cheek and they all make their way out and back home. I recount the twists and turns that is my new on-foot commute as I walk down the concrete steps.

I make my way to work, correctly remembering the turns and the streets. I've been studying the dictionary, but I don't recognize a single street name. But I do make it there, walking up the steps at an angle so I can make two steps each.

I walk through the door, and *Herr Stampfen* stomps his foot and shouts, "Hail Hister."

I raise my arm in never ending shame, "Hail, Hister." He accepts it and I walk down the hall to my desk. I've gotten considerably faster at copying the documents in a language I'm only a beginner at, but nowhere near the speed of the other girls.

I sit down at my desk and look at the time; right on the clock. I start working, taking the first page on the stack. I look at the title, labeled *Torwächter*, a pair of words familiar to me. I make out a few words of the document, but nothing I can understand. Edith walks in and sits next to me and starts going at it on the typewriter.

The day goes on and I see *Torwächter* an unreasonable amount of times. "Careful, those are sensitive documents," *Herr Stampfen* whispers behind me, making me jump in my chair.

"Oh, yes," I say, going back to work.

"I've received a telephone message for you," he says, "In regards to the health of one *Charles*." I stop my typing and see that he's holding out his hand, meaning for me to come with him.

I stand up and follow him into the hallway. "He's currently staying in the military hospital; he specifically requested that you be informed that he's, quote, 'been shot in the back and the ass.'"

"Oh," I sit there, speechless.

"If you'd like to go to him, I can arrange a vehicle pickup for you right now."

"That-that'd be great, actually," I start to panic a little on the inside assuming the worst that he might die.

He puts his hand on my back, pushing me along to the front of the building where there's a military vehicle just waiting there at the bottom of the steps. He leads me down the awkward steps and opens the door for me to get in. He says something to two men sitting in there already.

"Hail Hister!" they say to each other, before we start to drive off.

"So, you headed to hospital too, shnookums-" the other soldier slaps the back of his head whilst I sit there in some sort of shock.

"Just drive, dumbnut!" the other man says. Before I know it, we arrive, but I just stare at the building.

Why am I feeling like this? I ask myself, *I barely know the guy.*

"Hey shnookums-" the driver gets slapped again, "You want me to walk you in?" the other soldier punches his face and he falls down to the ground.

"You want to check in yourself?" he shouts, "I'm sorry for him, he forgot how to be a gentleman."

"Yeah, it's fine," I say, walking myself to the door. My arms get cold and a shadow dawns on me. I feel the cold gaze of the silver man as I look behind me to find the other soldier opening the door for me. "Oh, uh, *danke*," I say, walking in.

"Um," He rushes in behind me, "Who are you here to see? You seem a little out of it."

"Charles," I tell him. He walks up to the desk and I just keep on walking further into the complex.

“She’s here for, uh, *Charles*,” he says to the desk lady. She gives him directions to the room, but I just keep walking on. The soldier rushes beside me and places his hand on my back to guide me.

He opens a door revealing a room with bed after bed all next to each other separated by curtains. I look around and see his family standing and talking around him.

“Oh!” Jessica sees me, walking over to me, “Charles! Charlie is here!”

I look over around the curtain to see him with a tube in his arm. “Hey!” he says, speech slurred, “Charlie!”

“Hey,” I walk over, “Charles; you’re alive.”

He starts laughing and a sense of relief washes over me as I see him in good enough condition. “It was only 3 bullets, they fished ‘em out. They’re letting me keep one,” he says, shaking a cup with a mushroomed bullet inside.

“That’s, uh,” I pause, “nice.” I rub my face and try to wake up from this weird dream.

A nurse walks up to me, “He’ll be alright, no worries.”

“Guys,” he starts, “You have no idea how high I am on morphine right now.” he shakes his head a little and sets the bullet cup down.

“He’s been talking crap for hours,” Jessica tells me, being slapped in the back of the head by her mother, followed by some exchange between them.

I put my hands on my head, “I’m just glad you’re alright Charles.”

“He’s glad you’re here,” Jessica tells me, “He’s just out of it. Visiting hours are almost done, we’ll have you over for dinner when he’s ready to come home.”



"I appreciate you visiting me, Charlie," he says as I help him down into the hospital bed, "How have you been adjusting?"

"I'm adjusting," I tell him, "The girls at work are nice; my new place is, to be honest, better than my place at Greenwich."

"I actually have a phone now."

"You mean you didn't have a phone in Greenwich?" he asks.

"I was pinching pennies, okay!?" I say, stretching my arms, "Betty's didn't pay well; jobs were stretched thin by the war."

"I'm sorry about that, by the way. It's rough being displaced."

"Honestly," I confess, "My life is better here."

"Charlie," he goes on whispering, scratching his head, "Do you know why I fight for something I don't believe in?"

"It's because, for the sake of my family, it's better to be safe than to be right sometimes."

Deep down, I know it. I playfully punch his arm. "It's just conflicting sometimes--"

"Not for me," he says, "I'd rather be on the winning side of this war."

"How do you know Hister is going to win?" I ask, "I witnessed one of the Amerian bombs first hand--"

He pulls me close, "Because with the power of the Gate Guardian, he can do it! You saw that first hand too."

"Where did he even find the *Gate Guardian*?" I ask, sitting down next to him, "Like when does something like that even exist?"

"There's this *foundation* that was keeping it under wraps in the Middle East; Hister is just making it chase an olive branch."



The cold winter wind blows down my neck, reminding me to buy a winter coat. I knock on the family door, and Charles opens up the door in full dawned in his army uniform.

“Come on in,” he welcomes me. I walk in and catch a glimpse of their intellavision; a map with a red line going up from Arabia all the way into Angland and back down a little.

“Hey Charlie!” Jessica greets me, with the little girl waving to me, “My mother made some pasta.”

“Oh great!” I walk in, rubbing my arms to get warm, “Can’t remember the last time I had pasta.”

“Oh! And Charles got a melted chunk of concrete from Londen,” she sounds excited, “It’s totally rad.”

“Jess,” he motions to her to stop. He walks me in and pulls out a chair for me.

“So what’s with the uniform?” I ask, sitting down.

“Jessica likes it when I wear it,” he replies, sitting down next to me.

“I like the hat,” she juts in, “I think it’s cool.”

“Mama!” Charles starts exchanging with his mother. For the life of me, regardless of how much I study the dictionary, cannot understand that woman. Their mother brings a big pan full of pasta, and Jessica starts serving herself only to be stopped from a slap on the hand.

Charles starts making a plate and sets it in front of me. “Oh thank you,” I say as he makes another plate.

“How’s work treating you?” he asks, handing the plate across to Jessica.

“Oh, it’s just like if you were copying papers in a language you don’t know,” I say, “Something along those lines.”

“Is that what they’re having you do? Pay well?”

“Yeah, you could say that,” I reply. He grabs my hand, and for a brief moment of confusion I stall before he starts praying over the food. I quickly bow my head and watch around me to see Jessica making a face at me. We eat, enjoy the meal. Charles tells me it’s homemade.



I open the door, being greeted with an icy gust of wind blowing into my uncovered face, but my arms are protected by my new winter coat I splurged on. It's a nice shade of dark red with a brown fur lining.

I look about, not seeing traffic making its way through the street, though I do see an automobile speeding down, and it's gone in blink of an eye. The phone starts ringing, but I close the door and make my commute to work.

The streets are almost empty, nearly no persons, just the occasional vehicle going down the street. I think to myself, *Why is no one here?*

I come to the steps of my workplace and I see an empty foyer. I rush up the steps, making one leap of a step after another up to the tinted glass door.

I cup my hand around my eyes to try to peer into the building, looking for a clock thinking I'm earlier than usual; before opening. But no, the clock ticks on time. *Oh, no*, I tell myself, *Not again...*

The revving of an engine grows too loud from the background and *CRASH!* The army truck flies up the steps as I turn to see the commotion.

One of the men starts shouting at me in Jermain. "I don't-" I try to say.

"God is striking!" he says, jumping out and chasing after me. He just sweeps me up and runs over back to the vehicle and sets me in.

"Charlie?!" Charles looks at me, "What the hell are you doing? You didn't pick up the phone!"

The vehicle jumps and then starts driving away. He grabs my face to stare at him, but I look behind him to see the silver man.

“Don’t look at him,” he shouts as I try to move his hands, “Look at me, Charlie!”

“What-Why,” I start to trip over my words, “He-he’s here; why is he-”

BOOM! I see the ray of death burning the clock tower down, and the silver man pushing the building next to it. I scream, but Charles covers my ears, but it’s too late, I’ve been tipped over the edge.

My heart starts beating hard through my ears and my arms grow cold. The ray of death sweeps behind us, melting and burning the buildings and road. The driver curses and swerves to turn onto an interstate to the next city.

I start to panic and rock back and forth. *BOOM!* An explosion goes off behind us, spraying some gravel into the truck. Charles Grabs my face again, “Look at me!” he shouts over the ray of death, “You’re still my top priority! Stay calm-”

The ray beams out in front of us, melting the road and blinding me as I look to it. The driver swerves to the right, knocking the other soldiers over.

I look up to see the city on fire, and American planes off in the distance. “They-The Americans,” I point my finger.

“Look at me!” Charles points my face at him, “They’re the last hope of controlling this thing- *Everything* will be okay!” I look at him, deep in his eyes as he wants me to believe him.

But I don't. *BOOM!* The ray crashes right next to us, pushing the car to the side. We get knocked out and land on the dirt side of the road. The soldiers hop back onto their feet and rush to go push the truck back right side up, leaving me to stare into the eyes of death.

"Heave!" they all shout, pushing the truck over.

The Amerians are right over head, distracting the silver man: The Gate Guardian. The planes begin to raid their bombs upon the The Gate Guardian; it's brighter than the sun as the explosions go off in red fireballs.

The guardian slaps one of the plans out of the air as I look upon the big-plane, the one that drops the city-erasing bombs. I'm unable to close my eyes as I watch the plane approach, but I pray nonetheless, saying my last goodbyes to this world. The truck's engine sounds like it stuck and Charles runs up to me, wrapping his arms around me, telling me to close my eyes.



Notes on 0-0-1 The Gate Guardian



“0-0-1 The Gate Guardian: Destruction of The Axis” is based on “SCP-001 Proposal CODENAME: Dr. Clef - The Gate Guardian” By “DrClef”:
<http://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/dr-clef-s-proposal>

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